

The Discerner

the voice of... **Religion Analysis Service**

A QUARTERLY EXPOSING
UNBIBLICAL TEACHING & MOVEMENTS

Volume 41, Number 4

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*"Hereby know we the spirit of truth
and the spirit of error" 1 John 4:6*
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The Discerner

A Christian Apologetics & Counter-
Cult Ministry

Volume 41, Number 4

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WITH THIS ISSUE

Welcome to another edition of *The Discerner*!

As you've probably noticed, we try to find diverse as well as interesting articles for each issue. And we encourage you, our reader, *to discern* what you're reading and to compare and test it, as always, to God's Word!

For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Hebrews 4:12 (NKJV)

For this issue...

Our featured article is Part One of a biblical critique concerning the central role of Mary in the Roman Catholic Church and how her exaltation undermines the unique role of Christ in the salvation and sanctification of Christians.

Our second article is an inside view of the challenge facing former Christian Scientists after they escape the cult of Mary Baker Eddy, and how they must navigate health and health care concerns. This is a very insightful article by Katherine Beim-Esche.

And as always, try our Quiz, this time on the subject of the Roman Catholic Church.

Blessings in Christ and Merry Christmas,

Steve Lagoon
President

FROM OUR READERS

We received the following very thoughtful letter in response to my article on alcohol in the Fall 2021 issue of *The Discerner*. The author, Pastor Poorman has given me permission to share his letter with our readers:

Let me first of all say that I have appreciated receiving *The Discerner* for a few years. Several copies come to the church and they are quickly picked up by those who have benefited from your timely articles on a variety of subjects.

“However, I would like to ask that our subscription of *The Discerner* be cancelled due to the recent conclusion Rev. Lagoon made regarding Christians and alcohol . . . The comment that “those who drink know their limits and know if and when they need to stop to avoid intoxication and thus sin” is simply not true. As a pastor for nineteen years, I have seen the results of those who thought they could “handle” a drink or two and eventually this “moderation” led to drunkenness. I know it is only anecdotal, but it has happened in my own family. For believers (or any one for that matter) to think that they can moderately put poison into their bodies and not be harmed is naïve . . .

“I would hope and pray that you would see my responsibility to the flock over which God has made me overseer. Part of that responsibility is to not put anything in their hands that is contrary to what I believe the Bible teaches about this matter of alcohol . . .

Thank you,

Pastor Mark Poorman,
Woodcrest Baptist Church, Fridley Minnesota.”

I want to thank Pastor Poorman for his thoughtful and passionate letter. Indeed, I have had the privilege to speak directly with Pastor Poorman and to acknowledge that his point was well-taken in as much as he is correct that it is simply not the case that those who drink always know their limits, and know when to stop. Unfortunately, experience does show that alcohol can be a most subtle deceiver, and that by it, too many have been seduced.

I was personally exposed to the ravages of alcoholism in my youth and I know all too-well the devastating effects of alcohol abuse. While my article was meant to provide a biblical assessment of the use of alcohol, and had argued that it is possible for a Christian to drink moderately and responsibly, nevertheless, we honor all those who have made a commitment to simply avoid altogether the dangers of alcohol.

DR. CLYDE BILLINGTON

Our New Board of Reference Member—Dr. Clyde Billington

We are excited to announce that Dr. Clyde Billington has agreed to serve on the Religion Analysis Service Board of Reference!

Below is a brief biography from Dr. Billington's website, *The Institute For Biblical Archaeology*, located at <http://bibleartifax.com>:

“Clyde E. Billington, Ph.D. He is the current president of the Near East Archaeological Society and the digest editor of Artifax magazine. He is also the executive director of the Institute for Biblical Archaeology. He taught for 22 years at the University of Northwestern in St. Paul, MN, where he was a full professor of ancient and medieval history, and where he also taught biblical archaeology. In the past, he also taught at a Christian seminary, a public high school, two secular universities, and was the headmaster of a Christian school. In addition, he is an ordained minister who pastored a church for 5 years. He has over 50 articles that have been published in a variety of scholarly sources. He holds 4 university degrees, including a Ph.D. in ancient history from the University of Iowa. Dr. Billington is now retired and lives in Florida with his wife Ellie.”

Welcome Dr. Billington, and thank you for your support of Religion Analysis Service!

Note: Discerning readers can also access Dr. Billington's website by (1) visiting the RAS Home Page (ras.org), (2) clicking on the heading “Useful Links”, and (3) Scrolling down to “Theological and Philosophical Resources.”

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH AND MARY: A BIBLICAL EXAMINATION, PART 1

by Steve Lagoon

The goal of this article is to examine the role of Mary, the mother of Jesus. More specifically, we will examine the place that Mary holds in the Roman Catholic Church and compare this with the biblical portrayal of her.

This subject is captured under the title of Mariology, although critics often include it under the title of Mariolatry.¹

John Wilder, a Baptist, placed the role of the Virgin Mary in perspective:

“The most honored woman this world has known is the blessed Virgin Mary. No mother of a prince, emperor or president can touch the acclaim deserved by this humble peasant woman whom God Almighty chose to be the mother of . . . His Son . . . The Angel said to her, ‘Blessed art thou among women.’ That honor stands.”²

The Catholic apologist Matthew Pinto proclaimed the special place of Mary in God’s program:

“Mary must be special. Out of all the billions of people in history, she was chosen to be the one who would bear God in her womb. She would be the one to nurse, play with and teach the infant Jesus, who is God. This is a big task.”³

The role of authority in Protestantism and Catholicism

To begin with, we must keep in mind an important difference between Catholics and Protestants regarding authority. Protestants are committed to the principle of *Sola Scriptura*. This means that theology should be based upon the Scriptures alone which are the final authority.

Roman Catholicism, on the other hand, recognizes both Scripture and Tradition with a capital T as sources for authority. For Protestants, tradition is important, but always subservient to the Bible witness.

1 For example, Lorraine Boettner, *Roman Catholicism*, Phillipsburg NJ (The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1962) 133.

2 John B. Wilder, *The Other Side of Rome*, Grand Rapids MI (Zondervan Publishing House, 1959) 66.

3 Matthew J. Pinto, *Did Adam & Eve Have Belly Buttons? And 199 Other Questions from Catholic Teenagers*, West Chester PA, (Ascension Press, LLC, 1998) 159.

For Catholics, the Bible and tradition are more near partners as sources of Truth.

The *Concise Catholic Encyclopedia* explained:

“In a special sense, there is but one source of revealed truth and this source is divine Tradition. By this is meant the body of revealed truth handed down from the apostles through the ages and contained in the doctrine, teaching, and practice of the Catholic Church. This is, as the Council of Trent defined (Sess. IV, EB 46), inclusive of both the written Scriptures and the unwritten traditions and or tradition.”⁴

The Protestant J. C. Macaulay responded:

“So the cat is out of the bag again: the real appeal of Rome is not to the Scripture, but to tradition, and the teachings of the fathers . . . For with Rome it is not Scripture that moulds dogma, but dogma that determines the meaning of Scripture.”⁵

John Wilder added:

“The lack of Bible authority does not disturb the leaders of Catholicism in regard to this woman [the Virgin Mary]. Their position is based entirely on their own traditions . . . Sometimes Catholic leaders make an attempt to explain their doctrines in the light of the Bible, but when this is done, the Bible usually suffers mutilation in the process.”⁶

Surprisingly, Catholic apologist Alan Schreck acknowledged this reality concerning Marian doctrines:

“Where did these teachings come from? They are not explicitly taught in Scripture, and it is not even historically clear that they were handed down from the preaching of the original apostles. Rather, these beliefs emerged over time as Christians reflected on what the Bible says about Jesus and his mother.”⁷

4 *Tradition*, article in *The Catholic Concise Encyclopedia*, Robert C. Broderick Editor, New York (Simon And Schuster, 1957) 316.

5 J. C. Macaulay, *Truth VS Dogma*, Chicago IL (Moody Press, 1946) 69, 72.

6 John B. Wilder, *The Other Side of Rome*, 67, 69.

7 Alan Schreck, *Catholic and Christian: An Explanation of Commonly Misunderstood Catholic Beliefs*, Ann Arbor MI (Servant Books, 1984) 173.

Schreck defended this Roman Catholic practice of dogmatic theology divorced from the Scriptures by arguing that nevertheless, such teachings have been consistent with earlier revelation and have enjoyed an ongoing and widespread acceptance among the people of God, thus reflecting the ongoing guidance of the Holy Spirit.⁸

While it is certainly true that God is guiding the Church universal into all truth, nevertheless, we must insist that every truth claim must be in accord with the inerrant word of God. More to the point, the problem isn't just that the Marian doctrines are not established in the Bible, but that they are directly contradicted by Scripture.

Catholic imagery of Mary is in part based upon the Gospel of Luke and the nativity stories.

It is clear that the Bible endorses Mary as an exemplar of faith, a woman greatly honored of the Lord:

"And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women." (Luke 1:28)

"And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb." (Luke 1:42)

"For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed." (Luke 1:48)

"And it came to pass, as he spake these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto him, Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked." (Luke 11:27)

If we examine the *Ave Maria*, the *Hail Mary* prayer, we can see the very biblical basis for the first half of it:

"Hail Mary, Full of grace; the Lord is with thee: (Luke 1:28)

Blessed art thou among women, (Luke 1:48)

and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. (Luke 1:42 & Luke 11:27)

8 Alan Schreck, *Catholic and Christian*, 173–174.

Unfortunately, the second half was a later addition, reflecting the growing Mariology of the Middle Ages.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Mary in Apocryphal Literature

So, it is certainly the case that Rome's devotion to Mary has a basic biblical basis, nevertheless, most of Catholicism's Marian beliefs are post-biblical developments. One source for these developments can be traced to apocryphal literature.

Apocryphal literature can be described as an imaginative attempt at filling in the missing details of biblical stories with a popular appeal. As the old commercial used to say, "enquiring minds want to know," and this was no less true in the early Church period. People wanted to know, as Paul Harvey used to say, "the rest of the story."

What was Jesus' childhood like? What was happening in Jesus' life between his trip to Jerusalem when he was 12 until the beginning of his public ministry about age 30? For our purposes, people wanted to know more about Mary, and Joseph and the events leading up to the birth of Jesus.

There was no shortage of creative writers willing to embellish the facts of the biblical narratives with their own speculative ideas of how it may have been. These apocryphal accounts are usually offered as first-hand accounts of biblical characters, but were in fact, pious forgeries written in the centuries after the apostles had left the scene.

Mary, the Mother of Jesus, is prominent in such apocryphal literature, and many Catholics unfortunately accept these traditions as historically reliable. In his overview and defense of Catholicism, Kevin Johnson explained:

"So the early Christians, knowing that the Old Covenant was fulfilled . . . thought that they should make a written record of Mary's family—which was also a part of Jewish tradition . . . That's why the story of Joachim and Ann is recorded in books like the Gospel of the Birth of Mary . . . and more importantly, the Protevangelion attributed to St. James. You can still get these books in modern editions. They tell the story of the pious but barren couple, their prayers and sacrifices, and the separate annunciations to each of them, of the coming birth of a virgin . . . This is the first of all of the supernatural events that brought about

the coming of Christ, a preview of the Annunciation, and it's often shown in European art.”⁹

The Protevangelium of James

Johnson further described the content of the *Protevangelium of James*:

“In the Protevangelium you can also read about the presentation of the Virgin, another episode that you won't find in the Bible. It's still commemorated by the Church with a feast on November 21. Joachim and Ann, dedicating their daughter to the Lord, took her to the Temple when she was three years old so that she could live free from the corruptions of everyday life. The Protevangelium says that later, when Mary was of marriageable age, the priests consulted about her future. An angel told the High Priest to gather the walking-sticks of all the widowers in Israel and bring them to the Temple. Joseph's walking-stick burst into flower, just as Aaron's staff did in Num 17:16–25, signaling that he was the one. His staff topped with flowers is still the sign by which you can easily recognize images of St. Joseph.”¹⁰

Richard McBrien added:

“The apocrypha (non-biblical gospels, epistles, apocalypses) . . . were rejected as products of heretical or dissident groups. Among these, the most important source for Marian material is the Protevangelium of James . . . It was probably composed around the year 150 or so. The author posed as James, the brother of Jesus. It contains much detail about the early family life of Mary, her birth, her betrothal to Joseph, the annunciation, the birth of Jesus, the coming of the Magi, etc. Despite its condemnation in official documents, it dominated the development of the Marian legend for centuries. Neither in this document nor in any of the other material is there any clear evidence of a reliable historical tradition about Mary.”¹¹

We should not miss McBrien's important acknowledgement that the apocryphal traditions concerning Mary were not historically reliable and were thus “condemned in official documents.” Yet, these

9 Keven Orlin Johnson, *Why Do Catholics Do That?: A Guide to the Teachings and Practices of the Catholic Church*, New York (Ballantine Books, 1994) 38.

10 Keven Orlin Johnson, *Why Do Catholics Do That?*, 38.

11 Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism: Study Edition*, 870.

apocryphal accounts have long formed the image of Mary in the popular Catholic imagination.

Prominent Bible scholar Bart Ehrman also described the *Protevangelium of James*:

“This book is sometimes called a ‘Proto-Gospel’ because it narrates events that took place prior to Jesus’ birth (although it includes an account of the birth as well) . . . Focusing its attention on Jesus’ mother, Mary, the book provides legendary accounts of (a) her miraculous birth to the wealthy Jew, Joachim, and his wife Anna; (b) her sanctified upbringing in the Jerusalem Temple; (c) her marriage as a twelve-year old to Joseph, an old widower miraculously chosen to be her husband; (d) her supernatural conception of Jesus through the Spirit; and (e) the birth of Jesus in a cave outside of Bethlehem. Parts of the book rely heavily on the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke, but with numerous intriguing expansions, including legendary reports of Joseph’s previous marriage and grown sons, Mary’s work as a seamstress for the curtain in the temple, and the supernatural events that transpired at the birth of Jesus, including a first-hand narrative told by Joseph of how time stood still when the Son of God appeared in the world . . . We are told that an originally unbelieving midwife performed a postpartum inspection of Mary to be assured of her virginity. Since the book was already known to the Church father Origen in the early third century, it must have been in circulation soon after 150 C. E. The book was enormously popular in later centuries, and played a significant role in pictorial art of the Middle Ages.”¹²

Why this is so important is that it helps to understand the Roman Catholic mentality concerning Mary, and how such apocryphal traditions were treated as though they were reliable historical accounts, rather than what they were: pious embellishments of the gospel accounts with spurious claims concerning Mary’s biography.

Ehrman explained the biblical scholar Jerome’s influence in somewhat suppressing the impact of the *Protevangelium of James*:

“Jerome’s opposition to this Gospel account was enough to limit its influence on Western, Latin-speaking Christianity. But it continued to enjoy popularity in eastern Christendom,

12 Barth D. Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures: Books That Did Not make It Into the New Testament*, New York (Oxford University Press, 2003) 63.

as evidenced by the abundant number of Greek manuscripts . . . and by its influence on Christian art.”¹³

In assessing the value of the *Protevangelium of James*, Catholic theologian Raymond Brown provided this insightful commentary:

“We should be honest in acknowledging that The Protevangelium of James . . . is scarcely a reliable historical source. Nevertheless, it gives evidence of a tradition circulating at a very early period.”¹⁴

Brown’s explanation offers a double-caution. We should not prematurely place too much weight on the apocryphal nature of the *Protevangelium of James*, but neither should we too lightly dismiss the possibility that the text reflects genuine traditions already circulating in the early second century Church, not long after the close of the apostolic age.

The central role of Mary in Catholicism

Having considered both biblical and traditional sources for Marian doctrines, let us forthrightly examine the prominent role of Mary in the Catholic system. Boettner referred to a typical Catholic saying amongst Catholics:

“He [Jesus] came to us through Mary,’ says Rome, ‘and we must go to Him through Her.”¹⁵

Roman Catholics defend this intense focus on Mary by claiming that:

“Devotion to Mary, and to all of the saints, is ultimately devotion to Christ, whose grace has triumphed in Mary and the saints.”¹⁶

That is, the Catholic Church argues that every act of reverence towards Mary is ultimately reverence toward God. As we shall see, faithfulness to the Bible demands that we vigorously reject this claim. It was Jesus Himself that said, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me*” (John 14:6). It is clear that Jesus is the way to heaven, the superhighway to eternal life, and no Marian detours are necessary, needed, or appropriate.

13 Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battle for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew*, New York (Oxford University Press, 2003) 210.

14 Raymond E. Brown, *Responses to 101 Questions on the Bible*, New York (Paulist Press, 1990) 94.

15 Lorraine Boettner, *Roman Catholicism*, 134.

16 Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism: Study Edition*, 892.

So, not only does Rome impose itself in the place of Jesus through the whole sacramental system in which grace is doled out through the church, but, as we shall see, it actually claims that sinners need to go through Mary for grace. This is, of course, in stark contrast to the apostle Paul's definitive declaration that Christ alone is the way to God:

"For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5)

The progressive development of Marian doctrines in the Roman Catholic Church

Christian apologist Norman Geisler described the gradual development of Marian doctrine during Church history:

"The Roman Catholic dogmas concerning Mary reveal a progressive glorification of her. According to official Catholic doctrine, Mary moved from being sinless to being immaculately conceived to being bodily assumed into heaven and even venerated as Mediatrix (a mediator of grace) and 'Queen of Heaven.' There is a strong cult of Mary within the Roman Catholic Church that would carry it even further. Indeed, as we shall see, in practice, many folk Catholics virtually deify Mary..."¹⁷

Boettner noted the increasing nature of Marian devotion in recent history:

"The doctrine of 'Mary, the Mother of God,' as we know it today is the result of centuries of growth . . . and yet the full-fledged system of Mariology is a comparatively recent development in Roman Catholic dogma. In fact, the last one hundred years have quite appropriately been called the 'Century of Mariolatry.'"¹⁸

This development is frankly acknowledged by some Roman Catholics, as Alan Schreck explained:

"A careful study of the New Testament reveals a development or unfolding of the Holy Spirit's revelation to the church about the identity and importance of Mary . . . Later doctrinal definitions concerning Mary by church councils and popes are a continuation of the Holy Spirit's

17 Norman L. Geisler & Ralph E. MacKenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Differences*, Grand Rapids MI (Baker Book House, 1995) 311.

18 Lorraine Boettner, *Roman Catholicism*, 133.

work, leading the church into the fullness of truth about Mary and her role in God's plan of salvation.”¹⁹

It is certainly true that the Holy Spirit continues to guide the Christian Church, leading it into all truth, but the Holy Spirit would never lead the Church to develop the Marian doctrines that have no actual basis in the Bible He (the Holy Spirit) inspired. That is, the Marian doctrines are not merely post-biblical developments in accord with the spirit of the biblical witness, but rather, they are man-made traditions that run contrary to the Scriptures.

Potuit, Decuit, Fecit and fitness hermeneutics

This intense devotion to Mary led to a hermeneutical principle that was practically divorced from the Scriptures and common sense in equal parts. It is sometimes described as the argument from convenience, or the “fitness” method, or merely by its Latin name: *potuit, decuit, fecit*. Richard McBrien explained:

“By now theology in the West had become increasingly divorced from the Bible. A rational, deductive kind of argumentation prevailed. One form . . . was known as the argument from convenience. Its structure was simple: God (or Christ) could do something; it was fitting that he should; therefore, he did it. Potuit, decuit, fecit. This principle would play a large role in the development of medieval Mariology.”²⁰

Gary Wills also described this Medieval phenomenon:

“Not even that praise was high enough. Words used of each person of the Trinity were applied to her. The text of John 3:16 was recast, with her substituted for the Father: ‘Mary so loved the world, that is, sinners, that she gave her only Son for the salvation of the world.’ Her son’s claim was usurped when it was said that ‘the world was redeemed through her.’ The Spirit’s titles were given to her when she was called ‘comforter and teacher.’ This inflation of titles was rationalized by Duns Scotus (fourteenth Century) with his maximalist principle of Marian dignities: any privilege her son could give her, he would give her. (Wouldn’t any good son?) What was possible with her was plausible; and if it was plausible it was performed. Potuit, decuit, fecit.”²¹

¹⁹ Alan Schreck, *Catholic and Christian*, 166.

²⁰ Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism*, 874.

²¹ Gary Wills, *Papal Sin*, 210. All the sources in this quote are from the works of the historian Jaroslav Pelikan, as referenced by Wills.

It seems incredible that trained theologians once sanctioned such a subjective basis of theological speculation and tripped all over each other to prove their Marian devotion. Concerning the Catholic claims around this “fitness” hermeneutic as the basis for the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, Macaulay responded:

“The theological argument for the doctrine is summed up in the word ‘fitness.’ Three Latin words, after the order of Julius Caesar’s famous trilogy, are used to present the argument: potuit, decuit, fecit. The meaning is: he could, he ought, he did. God was able to keep Mary free from the stain of original sin at her conception; it was fitting that He should do this for the vessel chosen to such holy use; therefore, He did it. As to God’s ability we shall raise no question . . . When, however, men take it on themselves to dictate what was fitting for God to do for Mary . . . they are becoming judges of God, and going beyond their rights; and when they make a dogma to the effect that God did so, on the bare ground that they decree it was the fit thing for Him to do, that is carrying presumption to great lengths . . . It is not our privilege to legislate what God ought to do.”²²

Macaulay’s point is well-stated and well-taken.

How Mariology detracts from the uniqueness of Christ

We move now to consider the broad picture of the role of Mary in the Catholic system of beliefs. Kenneth Samples summarized the differences between Catholic and Protestant beliefs about Mary:

“It is not just that these Marian beliefs lack biblical support (nonbiblical); some of them undermine clearly defined scriptural doctrines (unbiblical) . . . What concerns Protestants most, however, is the way Mariology challenges the uniqueness of Christ’s person, and also detracts from the complete sufficiency of His work. If there is doubt about this, consider how Catholic Mariology parallels Christology: (1) Jesus was born without sin—Mary was conceived without original sin. (2) Jesus was sinless—Mary also lived a sinless life. (3) Following His resurrection, Jesus ascended into heaven—Mary was assumed bodily into heaven. (4) Jesus is a mediator—Mary is a mediatrix. (5) Jesus is the Redeemer—Mary is the coredemptrix. (6) Jesus is the new Adam—Mary is the new Eve. (7) Jesus is the King—Mary is the Queen . . . A further concern is that

22 J. C. Macaulay, *Truth vs Dogma*, Chicago IL (Moody Press, 1946) 70.

Mary, by virtue of her exalted status, has actually become a semi-divine being.”²³

And we shall see, unfortunately, the above is only a partial list of embellishments concerning Mary that strike at the uniqueness of Jesus Christ.

For example, whereas Jesus said, “In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:2–3), Catholicism audaciously stated, “This mother . . . is waiting and preparing your home for you.”²⁴

Types of Veneration Latria (God) vs Hyperdulia (for Mary)

As we examine Mariology within the Catholic Church, we should keep in mind the Church’s denial that Mary is worshipped. Geisler and MacKenzie explained:

“Catholic scholars are quick to point out, however, that ‘this [veneration due to Mary] is substantially less than the cultus latræ (=adoration) which is due to God alone, but is higher than the cultus duliæ (= veneration) due to angels and to the other saints. The special veneration thus given Mary is called cultus hyperduliæ. So God alone is worshipped in the sense of latria. Mary is venerated in the sense of hyperdulia, and saints and angels are honored with dulia.”²⁵

Paul Schrotenboer provided the historical details:

“At the Second Council of Nicaea (787) a distinction was made between the veneration due to the saints (dulia) and the worship (latræ) due to God alone. Already then Mary was regarded as being in a class by herself, and the veneration given to her was called hyperdulia. She was thereby placed about the other saints, but below God.”²⁶

Lorraine Boettner challenged these official explanations by arguing that the actual practice of Mariology exceeds the official explanations:

23 Kenneth Samples, *Appearances of the Virgin Mary: A Protestant Look at a Catholic Phenomenon*, Part Two, *Christian Research Journal*, Spring 1991, 25.

24 *Handbook for Today’s Catholic: Beliefs—Practices—Prayers*, A Redemptorist Pastoral Publication, Liguori MO (Liguori Publications, 1978) 24.

25 Norman L. Geisler & Ralph E. MacKenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Differences*, 320.

26 Paul G. Schrotenboer, *Roman Catholicism*, 32.

“The Roman Church officially denies worshipping Mary. . . Yet she tells us that Mary hears the prayers of millions and that she constantly gives attention to her followers throughout the world. It may well be that, as Rome says, she does not intend idolatry. But the intention and the practical working out of the system are two different things. We must insist that it is worship, and that therefore, it is idolatry as practiced by millions of people who kneel before Mary’s statues and pray and sing to her. Most of these people know nothing at all of the technical distinctions made by their theologians between adoration and worship.”²⁷

Titles used for Mary

To gain an understanding of the level of devotion offered to Mary within Catholicism, we can consider some of the many titles she is given. Paul G. Schrotenboer noted that:

“She is called: Mother of God, Queen of the Apostles, Queen of Heaven, Queen of the Angels, The Door of Paradise, The Gate of Heaven, Our life, Mother of Grace, Mother of Mercy, and many others.”²⁸

Concerns about the title Queen of Heaven and idolatry

One of the Marian titles in particular is troubling—the *Queen of Heaven*—for it is used in the Bible as the name of a pagan goddess. Jeremiah 7:18 says:

“The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead their dough, to make cakes to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto other gods, that they may provoke me to anger.”²⁹

Scholars debate the precise identity of this pagan *Queen of Heaven* mentioned by the prophet Jeremiah, whether it be the Canaanite goddess Ashtoreth/Astarte or the Babylonian goddess Ishtar. It is difficult to understand how the Roman Catholic Church justifies using such a title for the mother of Jesus.

²⁷ Lorraine Boettner, *Roman Catholicism*, 149.

²⁸ Lorraine Boettner, *Roman Catholicism*, 141–142.

²⁹ See also Jeremiah 44:15–25.

Mary the Mother of God

Another Marian title that raised a lot of controversy in the early Church period was the phrase, the *Mother of God*. Lorraine Boettner explained:

“The phrase ‘Mother of God’ originated in the Council of Ephesus, in the year 431. It occurs in the Creed of Chalcedon, which was adopted by the council which met in that city in 451, and in regard to the person of Christ it declared that He was, ‘Born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God according to the manhood’. . . The purpose of the expression as used by the Council of Ephesus was not to glorify Mary, but to emphasize the deity of Christ . . . Hence the term today has come to have a far different meaning from that intended by the early Church. It no longer has reference to the orthodox doctrine concerning the person of Christ, but instead is used to exalt Mary to a supernatural status as Queen of Heaven, Queen of the angels, etc.”³⁰

Gary Wills added further details:

“Early in the second century, Ignatius of Antioch . . . stressed that Jesus was ‘born of Mary’ to oppose ‘docetist’ views that Jesus was not a real man. The term ‘God-bearer’ (Theotokos) was used to fight the opposite error, that Jesus was not true God.”³¹

The concerns expressed about the title *Mother of God* in the early Church period are certainly understandable. It is important to avoid creating the impression that Mary was in any sense the source of divinity. But within the context of the theological debate surrounding the Council of Ephesus (and at Chalcedon), it is clear that the intention was to safeguard the true divinity of Christ.

Marian Doctrines

We will move now to consider the major Marian doctrines that have developed in Roman Catholic theology.

The Virgin Birth

We have noted that Protestants are in agreement with Catholicism concerning those Marian doctrines that are biblically based, and the primary example is the doctrine of the Virgin Birth. Conservative Protestants and evangelicals stand with conservative Roman

³⁰ Lorraine Boettner, *Roman Catholicism*, 133–134.

³¹ Gary Wills, *Papal Sin*, 208.

Catholics in their defense of the Virgin Birth of Christ against the attacks of the liberal-modernist movement.

Jesus Christ was not conceived after the normal manner of human procreation. Rather, Jesus had no biological human father. Instead, Jesus Christ was conceived within the womb of His human mother Mary by the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit. This far the Bible goes:

“But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us. Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name Jesus.” (Matthew 1:20–25)

Many agree with the Orthodox writer Sergius Bulgakov that at the moment that Mary answered the angel Gabriel, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word” (Luke 1:38) that “At that moment the Holy Spirit descended upon her.”³²

With the Eastern Orthodox Churches, we are thankful that the Roman Catholic Church stands strongly in support of the doctrine of the Virgin Birth. It has been pointed out that it is really the virginal conception that is at issue in the biblical record. Catholic Theologian Raymond Brown expressed it this way:

“I always prefer to speak of the biblical event as the virginal conception rather than as the virgin birth. What the Scriptures are describing is Mary’s conception of Jesus without a human father.”³³

But unfortunately, it is not only the Virgin Birth that Catholicism wishes to defend, but Mary’s perpetual virginity as well.

32 Sergius Bulgakov, *The Virgin and the Saints in Orthodoxy*, 67.

33 Raymond E. Brown, *Responses to 101 Questions on the Bible*, 88.

Mary's perpetual virginity

Indeed, the Roman Catholic Church has gone beyond the teachings of the Bible with their claim of the perpetual virginity of Mary. We should note, however, at the start, that it is not just Roman Catholics who have affirmed the perpetual virginity of Mary as Raymond Brown explained:

“Many times that [the Perpetual Virginity of Mary] is described as ‘Catholic’ teaching, but is more widely held. The Orthodox and Eastern Churches, as well as many ‘High’ Anglicans/Episcopalians, share the view that Mary remained a virgin.”³⁴

Roman Catholic scholar Richard McBrien explained:

“The New Testament provides evidence only of a belief in the ante partum (‘before birth’) virginity of Mary, i.e., in the virginal conception of Jesus. The New Testament says nothing at all about Mary’s virginity in partu (‘in the act of giving birth’); i.e., that Jesus was born miraculously, without the normal biological disruptions, nor about her virginity post partum (‘after birth’), i.e., that she had no normal sexual relationships after the birth of Jesus . . . This does not constitute an insuperable barrier to the belief that Mary remained a virgin after the birth of Jesus.”³⁵

McBrien further explained the widespread acceptance of the doctrine:

“Mary’s perpetual virginity, however, came to be almost universally accepted from the third century on.”³⁶

Boettner argued that perpetual virginity of Mary doctrine first appeared in the second century apocryphal book the Proto-Evangelium of James.³⁷ Catholic Scholar Alan Schreck pointed to the many prominent Christian leaders that have accepted the doctrine:

“Those who proclaimed Mary’s perpetual virginity include some of the most illustrious Christians of all time: Athanasius, Epiphanius, Jerome, Augustine, Cyril of Alexandria . . . Even the Protestant reformers Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Huldreich Zwingli affirmed their belief in Mary’s perpetual virginity.”³⁸

34 Raymond E. Brown, *Responses to 101 Questions on the Bible*, 92.

35 Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism: Study Edition*, 869.

36 Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism: Study Edition*, 871.

37 Lorraine Boettner, *Roman Catholicism*, 135–136.

38 Alan Schreck, *Catholic and Christian*, 174.

Raymond Brown forthrightly acknowledged the basis of the Catholic belief in Mary's perpetual virginity:

"We accept this doctrine of the 'ever virgin' not on the basis of a biblical text, but from Christian reflection on the sanctity of Mary and the way in which that sanctity was expressed in her life."³⁹

In contrast to this Catholic process of determining truth, Protestants refuse to present dogmatically what is not grounded in the biblical text.

"Knew her not until"

Contrary to the Catholic claims of Mary's perpetual virginity, Protestants Dreyer and Weller raised a voice of protest:

"The Bible says that Joseph 'knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name Jesus' (Matt. 1:25). The language clearly indicates that there was no continuing virginity."⁴⁰

Is it true that "*He knew her not until*" implies that Mary and Joseph began normal marital relations after the birth of Jesus? A straightforward reading of the text would seem to suggest so. But the Catholic Church demurs. Her theologians, with a desire to preserve the uniqueness and to honor Mary, have argued that the womb that held the divine Son of God is so 'sacred' that it is unthinkable that God would have had Mary bear other children.

And so, for instance, Alan Schreck stated:

"Regarding Matthew 1:25, the Greek and Semitic usage of the word 'until' does not imply anything about what happens after the time indicated. In this case, there is no necessary implication that Joseph and Mary had sexual contact or other children after Jesus."⁴¹

Although Schreck is certainly correct that 'until' doesn't demand or require that Mary and Joseph began normal marital relations after the birth of Jesus, nevertheless, the total case of the New Testament strongly suggests that they did just that, a quite natural and honorable course for a godly couple, as Mary and Joseph most certainly were.

39 Raymond E. Brown, *Responses to 101 Questions on the Bible*, 93.

40 F. C. H. Dreyer & E. Weller, *Roman Catholicism in the Light of Scripture*, Chicago IL (Moody Press, 1960) 190.

41 Alan Schreck, *Catholic and Christian*, 175.

What about the implications of Jesus as the *firstborn* of Mary?

Dreyer and Weller, arguing against the Perpetual Virginity of Mary, pointed to the implications of Jesus as the firstborn: “Moreover, the very word firstborn implies that Mary had other children afterward.”⁴² Alan Schreck disagreed: “References to Jesus as a ‘first-born’ do not imply that there was a second-or third born.”⁴³

Bertrand Conway, also defending the Catholic position, explained:

“The Mosaic law of the firstborn (Exod. XXXIV. 19, 20) held as soon as the mother had given birth to a son, whether he was the only one, or whether he was succeeded by other children. The Jews frequently spoke of a mother dying, when bringing forth her firstborn son.”⁴⁴

I must agree with Conway that the language of firstborn is not relevant to the question of Mary’s perpetual virginity since a woman’s firstborn child is called the firstborn whether or not other children are born to her.

See the next issue for the conclusion of this article.

42 F. C. H. Dreyer & E. Weller, *Roman Catholicism in the Light of Scripture*, 190.

43 Alan Schreck, *Catholic and Christian*, 175.

44 Rev. Bertrand L. Conway, C.S.P., *The Question Box, New Edition: Replies to Questions Received On Missions to Non-Catholics*, New York (The Paulist Press, 1929) 357.

LIFE AFTER CHRISTIAN SCIENCE: GOING TO THE DOCTOR

by Katherine Beim-Esche

Imagine being in your mid-20s (or even older) having never been to a doctor.

This is the case for many people who leave Christian Science. It may not seem like a big deal, but the entry point for regularly receiving medical care for former Christian Scientists can be a challenging, if not overwhelming, experience on multiple fronts: emotional, physical, spiritual, and psychological.

Health care is already complex for many people but it's even more so for a person coming out of Christian Science. When do we see a doctor? What is a physical? What is a referral? Who are medical specialists? It can be all the more frustrating and embarrassing as "we don't know what we don't know."

A major part of the recovery process from Christian Science is learning to pay attention to our physical bodies, after having spent a lifetime ignoring pain or discomfort. It can be a struggle for us to even accept that something is amiss with our bodies, much less negotiate getting help.

When we finally realize we need help, we may become anxious, not sure of what to do. Often, we are still learning how to report our symptoms or call a physician. Even a simple lab test can seem threatening. We ask ourselves: "What if something is wrong? What will I do?" "Who will help me, my Christian Science family?" Should I tell the doctor I've never received medical care before?" Not only is our health at stake but so are our emotions of fear and shame.

"Learning to care for your health is more of a journey than a destination."

I have found that there are some common hang-ups that keep former Christian Scientists from regularly seeking needed medical care.

Ideological:

Christian Science places such a strong emphasis on prayer for healing rather than receiving medical care that it can seem inherently wrong or unthinkable to seek medical care. Christian Science teaches that

seeking health care indicates a major spiritual failure, pointing to a lack of belief or faith in God.

Instinctively, we are easily repulsed at the idea of receiving medical care. For many of us it was taboo to mention physical illness, doctors, or medicine. We would be scolded for playing with toy ambulances, toy doctor kits, or even the game Operation. Today many of us joke about how our parents would mute the TV or make us cover our eyes during medical commercials and hospital scenes. While hospital buildings tend to be community landmarks, the Christian Scientist would often be oblivious to their very existence.

Shame and Guilt:

Because Christian Science teaches that sickness points to an ethical, moral, or spiritual failure, when we are sick, rather than getting medical help, we are quick to condemn ourselves.

We may avoid these feelings by denying that we need medical care. If we do seek care and get well, it's common for us to believe that if we had been more spiritual, we wouldn't have needed this help in the first place. As a result, we sometimes avoid discussing our sickness or medical procedures which would likely expose us to more embarrassment, judgment, and criticism.

This further isolates us. Even the best of us who have come to believe in the importance of medical care, can unconsciously believe that, once again, we are rebelling against our family's sacred beliefs by dishonoring parents, grandparents, and even great-grandparents. This can easily lead to emotional exhaustion.

Ignorance:

Many former Christian Scientists won't seek medical treatment out of sheer ignorance. We often were not raised with routines or awareness of proper care, whether that is preventative and regular such as eating healthy and receiving annual check-ups, or whether it involves the help of a specialist.

Sometimes we are unsure of what constitutes an emergency. For the first time we're learning to listen to our bodies and respond instead of ignoring or shutting down signs of illness.

Often, we don't know the medical history of our families because they didn't get care, compounding our ignorance and frustration. It can be as simple as knowing what first aid supplies we need. For example, if we get a fever, it's likely we don't even own a thermometer, know how

to take our temperature, nor what constitutes a fever. Over and over, we can hit frustrating, confusing, and embarrassing roadblocks.

Fear:

Some former Christian Scientists won't go to the doctor out of fear of the unknown. Absolutely everything is new for us.

We don't know what happens in an exam room. We don't know how to ask if we should be concerned about something. And if there is a medical issue, we don't have a framework with which to address it. Sometimes it can seem preferable to continue to live in denial as this has been our status quo. Avoidance often seems easier than facing the cold and harsh reality that everything might not actually be "perfect."

It's as if a remnant of fear whispers in our hearts saying that we might be making God mad or forfeiting his help when we seek the medical route. Perhaps our sickness is God punishing us for leaving Christian Science? While we know these thoughts are irrational, they are common for those recovering from Christian Science. Unfortunately, this can result in prolonged unnecessary suffering or missed opportunities for recovery.

How to Change:

"If we do seek care and get well, it's common for us to believe that if we had been more spiritual, we wouldn't have needed this help in the first place."

Even with these roadblocks, people recovering from their Christian Science background often do eventually receive medical care.

The good news is that you don't have to do everything at once...or alone.

It's wise to do a lot of research, take things step by step, and invite some friends to help you along the way. Learning to care for your health is more of a journey than a destination.

First steps to consider in your medical journey:

1. Be patient with yourself.

Navigating the healthcare system may be confusing. Even non-Christian Scientists will tell you they find it difficult. Reward yourself for little victories and offer yourself a lot of compassion.

2. Get health insurance.

Healthcare is expensive, and you will need insurance to receive adequate care. You can enroll in it either through your employer, your spouse's employer, or the Healthcare Marketplace. If you are 65 or older, make sure you're enrolled in Medicare and have chosen a supplement or advantage plan as well.

3. Find a primary doctor.

Find a primary or general practice doctor that is in your insurance's network of physicians (in-network). This person is your go-to advocate when you are sick. He or she oversees your overall health and will recommend that you see specialists when needed. Primary care physicians may be listed as family practice physicians or internists. Often their offices are staffed with Nurse Practitioners (NPs) or Physician Assistants (PAs) and it's likely you might meet with one of these before meeting the doctor.

4. Schedule an introductory appointment.

Set up an introductory appointment with your primary doctor. This is called a "well visit" and will typically be billed as an annual "physical" by your insurance.

Before your appointment, spend some considering any health issues you've had previously along with any concerns you have now. Write down as much as you can and bring your list to your appointment as it's easy to forget things in the moment.

Also, your physician will want to know as *much family medical history* as you are able to report. This can be tough as often our family's medical history is either unknown or has been kept from us.

Make sure you tell your doctor about your *Christian Science background*. Often, they are familiar with it and have treated other people with this background. Typically, they are very compassionate even thrilled that you're finally getting medical help.

If you have not been vaccinated, or have missed some vaccines, this will be a good time to discuss next steps with your doctor. Also, almost every visit to a physician includes asking if you have any allergic reactions to things like latex, penicillin, or specific foods. It is likely that you do not know if you have any allergic reactions because you were raised with little or no medical intervention and treatment. Make sure you let your physician know about this so he or she can catch issues early on if they prescribe a new medicine or medical procedure.

Stress that you don't practice Christian Science anymore, and that you still have a lot to learn about the healthcare system. *Communicate that you want them to be proactive in helping you get caught up in your medical care journey.*

5. Ask friends for advice.

Find a couple of friends whom you trust and ask them for help. It's great to talk with both non-Christian Science friends who are in a similar age and stage who can refer you to capable local physicians, as well as other former Christian Scientists who understand your struggles.

It might take some time before you feel completely comfortable talking about medical care but rest assured, non-Christian Scientists discuss their health and ailments all the time. It is a normal and important part of everyday life.

6. Get a second opinion.

When deciding about a procedure, new medicine, etc. sometimes it's wise to get a "second opinion" unless it's an emergency with immediate action needed. Sometimes doctors have different perspectives about treatment plans. For example, some doctors quickly recommend medicine and surgeries while others try alternative pathways first. It's important that you feel comfortable with your care plan. Frequently there are various options that carry different benefits and risks.

7. Ask questions.

Don't feel embarrassed for asking basic questions and a lot of them. Often, physicians assume you know information such as how to take a particular medicine, or what is involved in physical therapy, etc. Ask the doctor to give you specific directions and write them down if possible. Even non-Christian Scientists talk about how they must slow the physician down to have him or her explain or repeat details. *It's your right to understand what is being told to you.* You are always welcome to bring a friend or family member to your physician visits.

Summary

Getting medical care after Christian Science can be both a huge relief but also stir up a lot of emotions in your heart. It's so important to be patient with yourself because in most cases the learning curve can be high.

Also, many of us are unlearning a worldview while negotiating a new one for ourselves and the others in our care.

Wherever you are in your journey, know that you're not alone.

*I encourage you to try taking a small step forward. You will be thankful you did and the people around you will be too. It's so important to take care of your body and steward your health.*¹

Katherine Beim-Esche

Katherine is the founder and director of the Fellowship of Former Christian Scientists. Growing up as fourth-generation Christian Scientist she attended Principia, a school for Christian Scientists, from preschool through her first year of college. She started questioning her Christian Science faith and ultimately left after September 11, 2001 when faced with the undeniable reality of evil in the world. Several years later the Lord pursued her and she came to know Jesus Christ as her Savior at a Bible-based PCA church. She was baptized and began studying at Covenant Seminary where she earned an MA. She felt called to start the FFCS connecting people with a Christian Science background with Christ-centered resources, care, and community.

¹ The RAS Editorial Team made formatting changes to this article without changing the author's intent or content. We are grateful for Katherine's work and organization!

QUIZ: ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

1. Which is not true of Catholic claims concerning the apostle Peter?
 - a. He was the first Pope
 - b. He was single while leading the Church
 - c. He was rebuked by the apostle Paul
 - d. When asked later by the other apostles, he denied that he denied the Lord three times.
2. Which is not true of Catholic claims concerning Mary, the mother of Jesus?
 - a. Her perpetual virginity
 - b. Mary pre-existed in heaven before coming to earth to give birth to Jesus
 - c. Her bodily assumption into heaven following her death
 - d. Her immaculate conception without sin
3. Which is not true of Catholic claims concerning Mary, the mother of Jesus?
 - a. Prayers are offered to Mary
 - b. Mary will defeat the Antichrist in the last days
 - c. Mary is the woman described in Revelation 12
 - d. Mary is called the Queen of Heaven
4. Which is the correct definition of a Roman Catholic scapular?
 - a. An instrument for holding the eucharist host during mass
 - b. A scap, whether wooden or metal, containing holy water
 - c. A sacramental cloth worn over the shoulders which conveys grace to the wearer
 - d. An informal derisive term for ex-Catholics
5. Which is not true of Roman Catholic priests?
 - a. They make a vow of celibacy
 - b. They have attended seminary
 - c. They have been ordained
 - d. They have survived the “Trial of Ordeal” being submerged for three full days.
6. Which is not true of the Roman Catholic Church regarding relics?

- a. Every Catholic church has a relic contained in its altar
 - b. They use Revelation 6:9 to justify the use of relics
 - c. Relics are often the bones of deceased Roman Catholic saints
 - d. At the time of their catechism, Catholic youth get to view the relics
7. At death, what place is not an option according to the Roman Catholic Church?
- a. Hell
 - b. Heaven
 - c. Purgatory
 - d. Kolob
8. What is not true of Roman Catholic popes?
- a. They typically reside at the Vatican in Rome
 - b. They are considered infallible when speaking Ex Cathedra
 - c. They have a special honorary key to the White House
 - d. They are said to hold the Keys to Heaven
9. Which is not true of Roman Catholicism and the Bible?
- a. There is a glass-encased Bible on the roof of every Catholic Church
 - b. They accept the Apocrypha as canonical
 - c. The Latin Vulgate became the official Bible of the Roman Catholic Church at the Council of Trent in the 16th Century
 - d. Laity were forbidden from reading the Bible years ago
10. Which is not a Roman Catholic order?
- a. Carmelites
 - b. Jesuits
 - c. Franciscans
 - d. Peterites

Answers:

1d; 2b; 3b; 4c; 5d; 6d; 7d; 8c; 9a; 10d.

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